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WILDLIFE SERVICES—NEBRASKA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Nebraska

Every day, farmers, ranchers, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Nebraska Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts. In 2001, the State's 53,000 farms and ranches utilized 46.4 million acres or about 94 percent of the State's total land area. Agriculture is Nebraska's primary source of wealth and its dominant industry. The State ranks 4th nationally in land dedicated to farms and ranches.

In addition to agricultural lands, Nebraska is a diverse ecological mix of urban and suburban settings and forested and grassland environments that are home to almost 1.6 million people. Accordingly, WS biologists work to reduce public health and safety risks and property damage associated with wildlife conflicts. WS reduces damage to livestock by predators, assists industries with various wildlife conflicts, and manages problems caused by overabundant urban wildlife such as raccoons and skunks. The program also manages wildlife populations at airports and military installations, assists agricultural produc-



ers in reducing blackbird damage at livestock feedlots, and protects the public from wildlife-borne diseases.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, the following in-depth examples highlight WS' role in protecting agriculture, public health and safety, and property.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—Nebraska's total cattle inventory ranks 2nd nationally and 16th in total sheep and lambs. Coyotes, red fox, mountain lions, and bobcats can cause significant losses to farmers and ranchers by attacking their livestock. At times, these losses are quite significant. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed WS customers in 1999 and 2000 and found that, in Nebraska, predators took from these producers an estimated 3,500 sheep and lambs worth \$217,600 and about 2,200 head of calves worth approximately \$700,000. Research results suggest these figures could be two to three times higher in the absence of an effective predator damage management program.

Unfortunately, these losses are felt more acutely by small farmers and ranchers. It is estimated that in Nebraska and other Western States, about 75 percent of WS' cooperative agreements are with small farmers and ranchers. The average farm size in Nebraska is 875 acres.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock from predators
- Protecting crop lands, water impoundments, trees and shrubs, and roads from beaver damage
- Protecting public health from wildlife-borne diseases
- Protecting the traveling public, military personnel, and aircraft from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting livestock feedlots, industrial equipment, and property from bird damage

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Nebraska:

- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies, bovine tuberculosis, hantavirus, West Nile virus, and chronic wasting disease that pose risks to public health, livestock production, and wildlife populations
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird damage to feedlots and sunflowers
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Protecting agricultural crops, roadways, timber, and forest resources from beaver damage

WS recommends and uses a wide array of tools to manage problems associated with predators. Producers are encouraged to continue the use of sound livestock management techniques and to use specialized fencing, lighting, and/or livestock guard animals to protect their herds or flocks, whenever practical. WS uses selective and environmentally safe methods to reduce local predator populations to tolerable levels. Pan-tension devices on traps and breakaway snares help ensure that only depredating animals are caught. In addition, WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), is working hard to develop new tools. Less injurious coyote capture systems and improved electronic frightening devices are a few examples. As these methods are developed and determined to be effective, they will be provided to field personnel and producers for their use.

Protecting Crops, Timber, Rangeland, and Other Property—Nebraska WS continues to see an increase in requests for assistance with beaver damage to timber and flooding of crops, roadways, and railway bridges. Losses to these resources will continue to grow as metropolitan areas expand and recreational trapping diminishes. In FY 2000/2001, WS responded to 422 occurrences of beaver damage, resolving these complaints with either on-site management or technical assistance. Beaver damage to various resources in Nebraska during this time period, resulted in losses of more than \$1.7 million dollars.

Protecting Air Travel—Every year, lives are endangered and billions of dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife collide with aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. NWRC conducts research from its Sandusky, OH field station to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and minimize risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to monitor trends and wildlife species of greatest concern to aviation.

Nebraska's busiest air-transportation centers are in Omaha and Lincoln, the State's two largest cities. Within these locales, the Nebraska WS program provided technical assistance, training, and direct operational assistance to several civilian and military airports during 2002. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments, are completed before direct management work is done.



Looking to the Future

Rabies remains a potentially serious public health problem in Nebraska, and is of concern to a variety of professional and occupational groups in our State, including physicians, veterinarians, farmers, and ranchers. Pet owners and livestock producers have been double-checking their animals' vaccination records after rabies cases in Nebraska reached a 13-year high. This concern has led to an increasing number of calls to WS. Wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies, West Nile virus, and chronic wasting disease will continue to require increased attention in the future.

Protecting air passengers is another growing concern in Nebraska. Increased air travel, coupled with growing populations of birds and mammals have created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife. Increasing public awareness of WS' professional role in addressing both of these problems has increased the demand for damage management services. WS' ability to respond to these needs in a timely and professional manner will depend on the availability of resources.

Nebraska Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

